Rose Tsunekawa

Rose, her mother Kikuyo Yonemoto Ito, her brother Roy Minoru Ito, and her grandmother, Chiyo Ito in Salinas, CA.

> “I think that Nikkeis were quite lucky in that sense, because we always worked so hard and our parents always taught us never say or do anything that is troublesome or bothers other people — have good respect for people and manners.”

Along California’s Central Coast in the farming town of Salinas, Rose Tsunekawa grew up as the eldest daughter of an Issei father, Yasuichi Ito and a Kibei mother, Kikuyo Yonemoto Ito. Despite the fact that her father was prohibited from owning land and the Depression years defined her childhood, photos of the Itos in the 1930s show a self-made family that’s happy, stable, and proud. The children are pictured petting the family’s dog, riding on bikes, and wearing kimono, often posed in front of their father’s Dodge — a symbol of his successful harvests.

Had the family stayed in Salinas, they would have met the same fate as their Japanese American neighbors: uprooted and imprisoned in camp. In fact, Rose’s father was already being watched by the FBI for sending care packages to Japan’s Imperial troops in China. (The packages were often filled with seemingly insignificant but rare and thus precious American luxuries — cans of pineapple and Hershey’s Kisses). One year before Pearl Harbor, the Itos left California on one of the last ships to Japan to bring their grandfather home to live out the rest of his years. But in their home of Nagoya, they would experience the terrors of war from the other side of the Pacific; surviving air raids, food shortages, and the devastating defeat of Japan.

In the aftermath of the war, Rose’s bilingual abilities and U.S. citizenship got her jobs working for the U.S. military, and living in Japan would allow

her to cross paths with her future husband, Tats Tsunekawa. But before getting married to Rose — who was considered army personnel — Tats had to be approved, and even went so far as to get part of his lung removed to erase traces of his past tuberculosis. They eventually returned to California together, raising a family and retiring in the heart of the Bay Area, not far from where Rose's parents had first settled, nearly 100 years earlier.

My name is Rose Asako Tsunekawa, used to be Ito. And I was born July 9th, 1930 in Salinas, California.

Can you describe a typical day for you growing up in Salinas?

My grandparents were here first and my grandfather was a carpenter. I don't know how he did it here because he didn't understand any English, or drive or anything. But he came here and so when my father was 16 years old in 1918, he came because his father was here around Salinas.

And I heard that it was very hard living in those days. Most of the immigrants, they were in a barn and on the second floor —or wherever — they had straw and that was their mattress. And then the ladies in those days they had to go work in the fields, too. So there's only one water faucet. The ladies would get up early, like four thirty, five o'clock, so they can be by the water faucet to do their washing before they went to work in the fields. Those were the very hard immigrant days. There was my grandfather, my grandmother, and I was the first born. And we had three Filipino men living in a little place right next to our house.

It was very hard. What prefecture were they from?

From Aichi-ken. And there weren't too many people from Aichi-ken. There were some families in Stockton, but not around Salinas and Monterey and Watsonville. So whenever the Kenjin-kais had their picnic we were always invited to all of them, which was nice.

So were you living among other Japanese workers?

No. My father every year, he leased a hundred acre lot and we raised lettuce. At one time I think it was sugar beets. But I'm not too familiar with that. I know when he was raising lettuce because we always played in the irrigation ditch [*laughs*].

So your grandfather migrated, and then sent for his son and wife?

Yes, he was sixteen. And fortunately, unlike the other Isseis that came at that young age, he had his father here. So he was able to go to live with an American family as what they call a houseboy. They would go to school and then they'd come home and they would do a lot of chores for the family. That's how he was able to learn some English and then after he learned some English, he was able to go to a mechanic school in L.A. So he was one of the fortunate Isseis that spoke some English. He was one of the first people that was able to get a Caterpillar because I remember my grandfather, he used to plow with a horse. And once the horse went and kicked him and he got a big bulge in his cheek and he stopped doing that. But fortunately my father had bought a Caterpillar. He was a little bit more fortunate. Every year my father had to go sign a lease and he'd go to the landlord's house. And of course I stayed in the car. And he was never invited in to a white man's house. The landlord would bring the paper and then my father would hold it against the door outside and sign it. And that was signing the lease for a year. Of course in those days, none of us had telephones.

Now how did your mother come to California?

My mother was born in Hawai'i because her father was a contract laborer or something. They were from Yamaguchi prefecture and my mother was born there. But when she was, I don't know, a toddler or maybe before grade school, her father decided to go back to Japan. And so she went to Japan and went to grade school there and then later on at 14, 15 years old, she came back to Hawai'i to live with her uncle and aunt. I think my mother's older sister was living near Salinas and so she, my mother, came from Hawai'i to Salinas and she got married when she was 19. And had to come

into a family with a mother-in-law. That was very, I don't know [*laughs*].

Was it hard on her?

Rose, far left, and Mabel and Dorothy Uyeno, dressed in kimono to dance in the Salinas Obon.

In those days the mother-in-law, the people that age in their late 40s or 50s, there weren't that many Issei women that old. And so a lot of Japanese immigrant brides or young brides came to America as a picture bride, most of them. They used to come to our place and talk to my grandmother because she was older and could talk to them.

About life in the United States? Or what were they going to talk to her about?

All these brides I'm sure had language problems, and of course, probably had a lot of issues with their husbands. And they were in a place where they didn't have any family or anything. So many of them used to come to our place and talk to my grandmother. And in those days, nobody had telephones. So whenever there was an illness or death or something, people were always getting in their cars to let their friends and people know. And I think they had some kind of circulation that they used.

While you were growing up, did your parents speak to you in Japanese?

I was the oldest and so my parents always spoke to us in Japanese. And then we went to Japanese school three days a week after grade school. Our father used to come and they would take turns taking us to Japanese school. And there was a library, about two blocks from there. So, while I waited for the other class to finish, I always went to the library and checked out free books.

So tell me about the family's decision to go back to Japan. Who wanted to go back and why?

In 1937 Japan started the war with China. In those days of course, the Isseis couldn't become naturalized, they couldn't even own homes. My dad every two years, he bought a new Dodge because that was his show of success. He couldn't buy a house or do anything, but if you worked hard, and his lettuce crop was good, then every two years he bought a new Dodge.

So the war started and of course the Isseis that came here, the men, they were usually called draft dodgers. And also the Japanese word for immigration is *imin*. There's another word, *kimin. Kimin* means to abandon. And so the Japanese people called the Isseis that came here *kimin* [abandoned people]. And then the men were called draft dodgers. Because at 20 years old, usually, they have to go into the army. And in Japan, in those days, it was the first son that inherited everything, usually the money or the place or assets. But they also inherited the debts, too. But when you are a second or third son, then you have nothing. So those were the ones that came to the United States. You know, it wasn't a very good time.

Rose and her parents, Yasuichi and Kikuyo in Salinas

So in 1937 when the war started, my dad was 35 years old. And since he was a draft dodger, he formed a club with some of the other Isseis that were at that age. So they used to get together and my mother and grandmother, they used to get the big rice sacks that were in those days, they were I think 50 or 80 pounds, and they were very strong sacks. So they used take that apart and sew them and make care packages. And they used to send care packages to the Japanese troops in China. And Hershey Kisses used to come in a big box, and they would take those boxes apart and then

they put a lot of Hershey Kisses. And then they put in pineapple cans. And the Japanese care packages from Japan, they never had anything that nice. I mean, chocolate was out of this world, for, I am sure, everybody. So they sent a lot of care packages to the front lines.

Wow. And your grandmother was part of that?

Oh yeah, my grandmother used to sew, too. We used to gather all these sacks and some of the Issei women after dark would to come to our place and they'd sew and make the care packages. So that's why they had been sending all these care packages which was very warmly accepted. It was, I guess, such a joy for the troops there.

So my father was the Northern California Vice President or something of this group. They used to call it *Heimushukai*, "Association of Men of Army Age," or military age. [The association's full name was *Heieki gimu shu kai*, translated to "compulsory military service]. And they used to have this group. And Mr. Yonemoto living in Sunnyvale was the President. And they got invited to go to the front lines in China because they wanted to thank the Japanese, the Nikkeis in the U.S. for sending them such wonderful care packages. And then in 1940 they had this ceremony in Tokyo. Well, I think it's not true but Japan was saying that their country was started in 2,600 years ago. So in 1940 they were celebrating *kigen nisen roppyakunen* — that's 2,600 year. So my dad and Mr. Yonemoto they were invited to that ceremony in Tokyo.

That is so fascinating that your father felt kind of sympathetic to Japan.

Well, in those days, they could not become U.S. citizens.

True.

If they wanted to go to Japan they got a re-entry permit. Not a passport, it's a re-entry permit. When they came back in 1940 after the ceremony, they had a good trip. The Japanese government, I guess was very appreciative of what they were doing in the United States. And when they came back, my

dad and Mr. Yonemoto, they were on the FBI's blacklist. And my grandmother had passed away in 1939. And my grandfather was quite lonely and he said he wanted to go back to Japan and die. And because things weren't looking so good for my father, I mean he was still able to farm and everything, but being on the FBI's blacklist and not being able to do much of anything anymore. So in mid-November, he decided to take us all to Japan. And my grandfather, I think, was happy that he could go back and die in Japan because he was very lonely.

And so we landed in Yokohama around the end of November. It was a 14 day trip. And we didn't stop in Hawai'i, I don't know why. I guess things weren't really that good anymore. Because it happened that our ship was the last ship before the war. Because the the next ship that left San Francisco had to turn back because the war started.

Chiyo Ito, Haruko, Rose, Roy, and Kikuyo Ito in Salinas.

Do you remember the name of your ship, by any chance?

I think it was Tatsuta Maru.

And by this point, did you have siblings?

I had a brother Roy that was two years younger and a sister, Hisako born in 1939. I had another sister, Haruko who passed away in 1937 around the age of three from diphtheria. In those days they didn't have any medication and she passed away. So my mother in those days was very sad due to Haruko's death, and then we went back to Japan. She really didn't want to go back to Japan but she didn't have much choice.

So we went to Japan and we docked in Yokohama and then a week or two later we went to Aichi-ken near where my father had an aunt. It was in the outskirts of Nagoya. That was in the real countryside. It was mostly farming

and so we rented a house. She was widowed at a very young age and she had a small farm, so my father helped with the farming. He was at that time, 39 years old. And my mother was seven years younger than him. So we rented a house, maybe a couple miles from my father's aunt's farm. The house was a two-story, very primitive you know. And a Japanese house. And in the back of the house was a grade school, grammar school.

And so when you were in Japan, you were about 12?

I was 11. And the war started December 8th and that was my first day of school in Japan. And so it was Monday and school had started. You know, I went to school, but I didn't really understand what the teacher was saying. Something about war but I didn't really understand, my Japanese learning here was third grade Japanese. And because of my age I enrolled in fifth grade in Japan. It was just very hard. In those days, we went to school six and a half days. Saturday was half day. So on Sunday, my brother and I had to go to a private tutor for Japanese. Not just the language. But I had to learn Japanese history and geography.

So when you got home that day, that was Monday December 8th, did your parents tell you what happened?

Oh yeah. They were very, very concerned. And after that almost every day, since we had just come from America, Japanese secret police were after my parents, making sure. Because they wanted to know if we had a shortwave radio for spying or whatever. I think they just stopped by, almost everyday, to make sure, talk to them.

Wow. So on both sides, the FBI in the U.S. and then the Japanese secret police were watching your parents?

Yeah, because we had just returned from the U.S.

And so how did things change, as the war was progressing? How did things change for you in Japan, in school and your friendships?

School was very, very hard. Especially because the military took over

everything, you know. So, one of the things I had to learn was how to write in kanji, the 126th emperor's name. I mean it was things like that we had to learn. I just knew the basic kanjis in third grade. And here I was in fifth grade, third semester, and in sixth grade, you have to study to take a test and to go into girls' school. And so it was very difficult studying, I think I used to cry all the time. But the schools in America, the Springs School in Salinas, it was more laid back. When I went back to Japan and had to study, I was like a sponge. And I was able to learn fast. The only thing I was good in was arithmetic. Because although I went to Japan in the fifth grade I had known the math for seventh and eighth graders.

Now when you started, it was 1942 by this point and the war between the U.S. and Japan was official. Did you experience any backlash being an American?

No, not too much. But I had to get used to the cold. The winters were really cold. And we didn't have that kind of jackets or overcoats. Salinas was quite foggy and cool but not like the winters in Japan. And it was hard to buy anything around that time. Getting food was hard, too. Fortunately, my father was working at a farm but then each farmer was allotted a certain amount that they had to give to the country so they couldn't keep too much. But at least we were a little better off than other families that didn't have that.

So my father, since he was in his 30s, if he was just a regular working person, he might have had to go and work in the military factories where they made a lot of instruments and stuff like that. But since he was farming, he was okay. He didn't have to do that. And he was too old to go into the army. So that was good. And my mother had to go work in the factory next door. And then in fifth grade, I studied hard and finally I did pass the exams to go to a girls' school. But as the war became more worse, we had to go and work in the fields. Because all the men, boys were in the military.

Rose, Hisako, and Roy, likely taken in 1941 in Salinas right before the family left for Japan.

Do you remember what you were farming?

We used to have to go and help take out the weeds, or the rice fields, I helped with that. It depends on the time of the year, you know, when you had to harvest or plant. So we used to do a lot of that. And very seldom did we go to school. And in the third year after the war started we had to go work in the textile factories in Tsushima — that's the town that we lived in. They had a lot of textile factories. We were making blankets for the military. But they didn't have any wool anymore. And they didn't have any cotton. They called it *sufu,* but it wasn't cotton, it was very weak stuff.

Now did your parents find out what was happening to the Japanese in the United States? Did they know?

No.

So they didn't know about the camps?

No, no. Very, very later on, maybe about a year before the war ended. I think there were some Isseis that were no-nos or whatever and sent back to Japan. And among them was somebody that my father knew from the association. And so he, I think he told my father what was happening. And of course if my father had stayed in this country he would have been sent to Tule Lake or whatever.

Do you know if your father was shocked at that?

No. My father was somebody that didn't say too much. He was a typical Japanese man that kept a lot of things to himself.

So during the war, you were working in the factories. But as Japan started losing, what did you witness and observe?

Well, during the last year of the war, we used to have more raids because Nagoya wasn't too far away. And Nagoya was where they were making Zero fighter planes. And they had the Mitsubishi factory there. And so the air raids by the B29 U.S. bombers became more frequent and almost everyday there was a siren. And the students, we were able to go into the shelters first before the other employees.

"I knew that when they machine-gunned you, they didn't care whether you're an American citizen or whatever you are down below."

Oh really? Students went first?

Students. And almost every day then, there was an air raid. And we were kind of happy, I mean at least we didn't have to work. And so you know for

lunch what they fed us, was just really, really poor stuff. I mean there was hardly any food in those days and most of it was going to the military. So here we were, you know working from 8 in the morning ‘til whatever. And just very soup-like things.

They were running out of food, I imagine. And so was Nagoya being bombed by the B29s?

Yeah, Nagoya was bombed. And then the B29s, after they heavily bombed Nagoya, then they would come back. And once when we were told that the air raid was over and that we could get back to work, then one of those B29s came swooping down and we got machine-gunned. And it was really scary! I knew that when they machine-gunned you, they didn't care whether you're an American citizen or whatever you are down below.

Oh my god. Were there any students killed?

Not the students. We all dashed into a warehouse and one of the employees was injured but not too bad. So after that, whenever they told us that the air raid was over and the siren came up and would be saying it's over, we were always very anxious — we weren't sure if it was right.

Yes, I'd be hesitant, of course. Terrified.

And then the last several months of the war, the Japanese homes are all — inside is paper, shoji paper and wood. And so, it goes up in flames right away. And so every night, we used to have to sleep outdoors. We were supposed to have an air raid shelter but it’s so humid there. And the house that we were renting, in the back was a lotus pond. And so, you could dig two inches and already you know there’s water. So you couldn’t make an air raid shelter or anything in the backyard. So we always used to sit outside with blankets or whatever we could and then we’d watch way far away where there is some light and we knew that town was being air raided. And every night it used to get closer and closer. It was frightening.

Did they come close to your home?

No, it didn't come that close yet. But every night it was getting a little closer.

Your parents — even though they didn't say anything — must have been terrified. I mean, they must have felt just uncertain of what would happen.

Oh yeah. Everybody was. It was the same for everybody.

Now when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, how do you remember hearing about that news?

I think it was in the newspapers. But the Japanese propaganda was just horrible. I mean they didn't tell the citizens what was really happening, especially on the battle fronts and other places outside of Japan where they were really losing. They weren't saying that. The media was not like it is now. That is where the Japanese, the military was very good at camouflaging what was going on.

Roy, Rose, and Haruko (before she passed away in 1937), dressed for an event at the Salinas Buddhist Church.

I think my parents were probably thinking that the war was going to end, that Japan was going to be defeated. But they couldn't say anything. So when the war did end all these secret policemen used to come to the house and they went about and they said, "Please forgive us. But that was our job."

Wow, that's incredible that they did that. So let's pick up from when the war was ending and Japan lost. What happened and what did your family decide?

We were in a textile company, when one day we were told at noon time to

come and listen to the Emperor speak. It was a hot day in August, in a field. And we went there and the Emperor's voice came over the radio. But it was hard to understand. Because, you know, they speak in a very different language [*laughs*]. Not language, but a different way of speaking. And the radio wasn't that good anyway and it was on the field.

And we were making blankets for the military. The factory was under military contract. So there were two military officers. One was a young guy, a lieutenant, that probably had to join the military although he was a college student. And then another one was a grumpy old man [*laughs*]. And he was he wasn't very nice, especially not to us students. He was very strict. And so, when the speech ended, when the Emperor's speech ended, this old soldier just started crying, and he landed on the floor. And he was just crying. I heard — and also it was in the papers — that for many days following the first speech, many military officers went to the Tokyo palace grounds and they committed suicide.

"We always used to sit outside with blankets or whatever we could and then we'd watch way far away where there is some light, and we knew that town was being air raided."

I don't think I knew that that happened.

I mean, they were sure that Japan was going to win and when they were defeated, I guess, they didn't know what to do. Their ego. So we knew that the message wasn't very good. But we all went home that day. And of course, everybody was talking about the end of the war. And like I told you, the Japanese military police came to my parents and bowed and said they were sorry and what they had to do was because of their work, their job.

Now I'm also guessing your parents didn't say much about how Japan lost. Did you get a sense of how were they feeling about it?

I think there was a sigh of relief. So as students we went back to school. But going back to school, they had to burn a lot of our textbooks because it was very militaristic, you know. Geography, history, even the Japanese textbooks had a lot of stories or whatever. And so we could only have music. But the music at that time was very militaristic. You know, it wasn't folk songs or anything like that. And it was a girls' school, but we couldn't have cooking or anything like that because there was no food to cook. So we went to school every day and we really didn't do much of anything, except maybe some exercising.

And two months after the war ended, I think this was in late October or November at this girls' school, this American Jeep — the U.S. forces were always in a Jeep — and they came and this lieutenant and sergeant or corporal was driving. And they came looking for me [*laughs*].

Wow, specifically for you?

Yeah. They had heard about me, I guess because one of my relatives had a very small shop in Nagoya. And in those days the occupation forces, the soldiers that came to occupy Japan, they would come and sell a lot of stuff that they had because Japan would buy anything. Do you know what C-rations are?

C-rations? No.

It's an army thing in those days. It's a box with food in it that goes to the frontline soldiers and it's got maybe a can of meat and a can of something and these soldiers would take out this C-ration and they would bring the canned meat because the Japanese didn't have any kind of meat. So they would bring canned meat and the things that were in the C-ration and they would sell it. And since one of my aunts had a small shop and since I could speak English, on weekends I would go there and the soldiers would bring things to sell. So, I guess some of them knew my name and maybe they found out where to contact me. They said, "We'd like you to come and work

for us." And I said, "Well, I'm only 15 years old and I am a student." And they says, "Well, we want you to do some interpreting." And I says, "Well, I would have to ask my father," you know. And they says: "Who is your father?" And I says: "He's working for an occupation force. You know, one of the army places near Nagoya. And they knew exactly where it was and they says, "Ok, you hop in my Jeep and we'll take you to your father's place" [*laughs*]. Here I was and the school and the teachers, they didn't know what was happening. And so they drove to this place where my father was working. He was working as an interpreter in the mess hall of the army, in charge of translating to the Japanese busboys. They asked my father, "We want her to come and work for us, for a little while." And my father says, "Well, I guess so because going to school she's not learning or doing anything anyway." And so that's how I started being an interpreter. And what [I was] interpreting was a court-martial. And this young American soldier had raped a Japanese girl.

Okay now I was 15. I didn't know what the word "sex" was or none of that thing. What they had was an interpreter. But the Japanese before the war, the English they taught was British English. And so this was a college professor that was being the interpreter at the court-martial but the Yankees couldn't understand his English because it was British English. And so my job was to say what this college professor was saying in American English [*laughs*].

Wow. You were interpreting the British English into American?

Well, I wasn't interpreting. This college professor was interpreting but they couldn't understand his English because his pronunciation and his accent and everything was British. So he was always trying to look for the most difficult word. He couldn't just [say it simply]. So, that was my job.

That must have been really intense, listening to that kind of trial. What other memories stand out to you during this time of working for the military?

When the war ended I was working for the U.S. occupation forces, first as an

interpreter. And at Christmas, Nagoya was just bombed heavily and people were living out in the open more or less. It was a very hard winter, very scarce, food was scarce and all. And this Christmas I had come to work, and this little table that was mine had a little drawer. And I opened my drawer to put something in there and there was this little cardboard box. And I looked inside and it was just filled with Hershey's and gum and Mars. I mean in those days, I think, there was only Butterfinger and Hershey bars. But it was just filled and these seven people in the office they get one, their ration was one candy or gum a day. And they had saved their ration for two or three weeks and put it together in a box and they gave it to me for Christmas. And that was the best Christmas present I had ever had.

I remember taking it home and my brother that was 13 and my youngest sister that was four or five years old, and every night with this light fixture, I mean dim light, and we'd sit there after dinner, and we'd each take turns selecting a candy and I'd cut it in three pieces. And we'd have a candy bar for months. I mean it was a whole box of candy that these seven men had saved for me for Christmas. And I always used to think of that when my own children were growing up. They would never be able to appreciate something like that, I don't think. I still remember that day. And how, I mean, how every night for two or three months, every night we would sit under this dim light and eat candy.

How did you end up leaving Japan, and when did you meet your husband? Was that in Japan?

Tats, my husband, had come back from the military when he was 17 years old. You see he went in when he was 15 and when the war ended when he was 17 and he came back to Nagoya. But his family's house and his family's business were air-aided. They lost everything. And so they were living in this dilapidated two story house in Nagoya that only had one pumping water and a toilet for six families. In those days food was very scarce. And sanitary conditions were just horrible. So many of them got tuberculosis and they passed away. Unfortunately Tats got tuberculosis too, but he was young and so I guess, he was spared.

He was coming to Nanzan to study. He couldn't go into a four-year university. So, Nanzan was a three year college. And so, he was studying there and then he went to work at one of the Air Force bases. I was working at a hotel and he was working at one of the Air Force bases. And at night, we would talk to each other, and do our homework and then keep us each awake at night at the switchboard.

So you met in college, at that college, then?

Yeah. This is at college, we were both working. He was two years older than I was. Because when the war ended I was 15 and he was 17. He went to war when he was 15.

Oh my gosh, you were so young when you met who would be your future husband.

That's war. I mean, Japan needed young people to join the military. And of course you know, when you hear of all that propaganda and everything, I guess, when you're in middle school and 15 years old, you had this idealistic picture of what winning the war or whatever.

Yes.

Yeah. And the pilot program, I think, was something that many young men looked forward to.

Wow. Sad though.

It's very, it's very different. It's hard to understand, I'm sure. I could understand it only because I went through it.

Well, Japan was so sure of its place in the world at that time. And you understand it from both angles, each side. It's complicated. How did you come back to the States?

I was still working and then after college, there wasn't too many English speaking jobs at that time. And the telephone office wanted me to stay and teach English to the operators. And so I was doing that and my husband,

after he graduated, he got a job at one of the Mitsubishi companies and he was working there. But we hardly saw each other. I mean, we were just trying to survive. And especially with him, his family lost the business and lost their house and they were having a hard time.

So when I was working my grandfather was still with us, but he passed away in early 1953. And when he passed away, my mother's older sister was living in Ogden, Utah, and when she heard that my grandfather had passed away, she says she could somehow get enough money to get me to Utah [so that] I could work and save some money and get my father and brother Roy here. So from 1953 to 1955 I was engaged to Tats but I told him, I would get my father and family back to the States. And then, when they did that, I would come back and get married.

In Japan?

Japan.

I see. So then did you save up?

Yes. I worked in Hill Air Force Base in Utah for two years and saved my money and then I was able to get my father and Roy back here. My father, he went to the consulate and in those days, he didn't have a visa. Just a re-entry permit, is what they had. So he showed them his re-entry permit and they says, "You were on the FBI's blacklist." And he told the consulate men, "Yes, but I was not able to become a naturalized citizen or own any property or anything in the United States. That's why I helped my own country, Japan. Wouldn't you have done the same thing if you were me?" And the consulate officer says, "Yeah, I guess I would have." And so he let my father come back with Roy.

Oh wow. That's incredible. What year was that?

That was in 1955. So they came back and started working at the Yonemoto Nursery in Sunnyvale. And then, later on I went back to Japan in '55 and I got married in a very simple Japanese ceremony. And then, I was looking for a job in Nagoya and there was still the occupation force, or the U.S.

military was still there in Nagoya and they were looking for a keypunch operator, which is what I did in Ogden, Utah. I learned how to keypunch. That was before computers. And I worked at Hill Air Force base for a couple of years. And in those days the keypunch operators in the military were GIs, you know, soldiers. And they were doing this, and the soldiers were always saying, “This isn't a job for men!” [*laughs*] And so I got hired as a keypunch operator.

When I wanted to get married I was working for the U.S. Army, so I was considered army personnel. And so I had to get married to my husband in the U.S. Embassy. I had to get permission from the U.S. military, just like when the U.S. military men get permission to marry Japanese women. They have to go to see a chaplain, they have to get all kinds of tests and procedures. That's what my husband had to go through. But he had tuberculosis at one time. And although it was inactive, it still showed up on the X-rays and they said, “No, he won't be able to enter the United States with an X-ray like this,” which is true those days. I don't know about now, but they didn’t let you enter. So after a long time, he went to a Japanese hospital and got his right lung removed, part of it, so it wouldn’t show up on the X-rays. And then finally he was able to get permission to marry me. And so my case was very unusual that I, the female, had to get permission to marry him.

“Cupertino at that time was just surrounded by orchards and it was just beautiful. Depending on what the orchard was, at different times the flowers were blooming. And it was beautiful. ”

Wow, and what year did you finally get married?

In 1955 we were considered married in Tat’s family *koseki* [family registry].

Since I was working for the U.S. military I had to go through the same process as the American GIs who wanted to marry Japanese women. It was a very tedious process. We were finally considered married by the United States when I registered Tats as my dependent in 1958.

And what year did you come back?

I came back in 1959. And he came a little later. Because he's the only son in his family, he has three older sisters, it wasn't a very easy thing for him to leave his family. But he came. And I worked at Lockheed and at a lot of different places. And after I started a family, I couldn't afford a babysitter. So I started working nights as a keypunch operator, and that then became computer operators. So, that was good.

And so you settled back in the Bay Area?

Yeah, we settled in Cupertino. Well, first we were in Santa Clara in this little three bedroom house. Then we wanted to change to a little better living environment. And so we saw this ad for this place in Cupertino. And Cupertino at that time was just surrounded by orchards and it was just beautiful, depending on what the orchard was. At different times the flowers were blooming. And it was beautiful. And we went to this place in Sunnyvale first. And this gray-haired, silver-haired sales lady, saw one look at me — I had my daughter in my arms because she was six months old. This was 1962. And she looked at us and right away we knew that she didn't want to sell to us.

Wow. Because of prejudice?

It could be that she lost her husband in the war or maybe her son. Anyway 1962 was still — we noticed right away. So my husband and I, we says, well the same builders are building in Cupertino and it's really out in the woods that place, you know. "But shall we go and look there?"

Rose at the Japanese American Museum of San Jose

And we went there and they had a silver-haired older sales lady there. And she looked at us and she says: “Are you Japanese?” And I thought: Here we go again. Because at the other place, she didn't ask us if we were Japanese or not, but I guess she knew. And so I nodded and said: “Yes”. And she says: “Oh good! There is a Japanese couple that works at IBM. And they just bought a place around here. Right there.” And so we knew that we are welcome. But at that time you had to they wouldn’t take a woman's income unless she was over 38, after the child-bearing age. So they would only take my husband's income. And at that time, to buy a three-bedroom home was $18,900.

Imagine!

And in Cupertino! You had to make $650. I borrowed some money from my parents to put a down payment so at least we could, you know, have a home. Make a payment. The payment was like $82 a month or something.

It was just such a different time.

It was!

Looking at what's happening right now, in terms of the political landscape, do you fear what's going on? Or are you concerned for almost a repeat of what happened?

Living around here, you know, you see so many different ethnicities,

religions. And, you know, you don't stand out. And it’s nice. But I'm sure that underneath there is still a lot of people with racial feelings. They just don't show it. I mean I never encountered any of it.

I think that Nikkeis were quite lucky in that sense, because we always worked so hard and our parents always taught us never say or do anything that is troublesome or bothers other people — have good respect for people and manners. That's one of the cultures, I think, of the Japanese. Never do anything to make trouble for other people. And leave everything neat and clean, you know. We were all really poor immigrants but our parents and grandparents always had some things they taught us.